

Jane eyre: textual analysis of chapter 26 essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



In the pages leading up to Chapter 26 Jane is in a state of emotional turmoil. She has accepted her master's proposal, although she has shown signs that she is mentally unprepared to be re-christened ' Mrs. Rochester'. The passage starts just as Jane and Mr. Rochester are arriving at the church, and Jane describes ' the gray old house of God' rising before her. The opening sentences themselves give us an insight to Jane's mental condition.

Throughout the novel Bronte depicts Jane as pious and God-fearing.

On Rochester's proposal, she declares their equality in the eyes of God; ' It is my spirit that addresses your spirit, as if... e stood at God's feet, equal, as we are! ' However in this instance she seems to regard the church with more weariness and contempt, calling it ' gray' and ' old'. Jane also calls the church a ' temple', and coupled with her reference to the altar, there may be barbarous undertones, with the ' temple' suggesting some kind of pagan religion, and the altar a sacrifice: the identity of the victim would be obvious. Jane's apparent shift in attitude towards The Church shows her unrest, as she is seeing it as a condemning force rather than a liberating one.

Some of the language Jane uses to describe her surroundings suggests that she feels the presence of a predator. There is something sinister in the way she describes the church as ' rising calm', like some kind of stealthy animal with its prey in its sights. Could Rochester be the predator and Jane the prey? This idea is further supported by other imagery in Jane's description, such as ' a rook wheeling round the steeple'. The rook is a carnivorous scavenger, and this gothic image has similar implications regarding Jane's feelings.

Perhaps the suggestions from the ' wheeling' of the rook are twofold, in that it may reflect the spinning of Jane's thoughts as she ruminates unceasingly over the situation. Jane describes the ' blood' as having ' momentarily fled' from her face, which again implies such apprehension. Such dark and pale imagery as Jane describes mirrors the bleak, austere opening to the passage. As the passage progresses we encounter the ' figures of two strangers'. Their significance is as yet unrecognised, but their unconscious presence before their secondary introduction makes the scene feel that all is not as it should be.

The inappropriate reference to ' the few mossy headstones' also gives the air that something is awry. Mr Rochester does not notice these two shadows, not even in the church: this may indicate that he has a preoccupation of some kind, and as a result his perception of the outside world has been reduced. The first half of the passage is rich, although transitory, in description. Jane gives short, fleeting accounts of different aspects of her environment, with each phrase separated by punctuation; ' the priest waited in his white surplice at the lowly altar, the clerk beside him.

All was still: two shadows only moved in a remote corner. ' Jane is ephemeral in her account, she is paying unnatural attention to her surroundings, suggesting hesitation on her circumstances. It is interesting to compare the account of this ceremony with Jane's second, successful binding to Rochester. Having successfully married Rochester in the final chapter of the novel, Jane assigns just one sentence to her wedding, describing it as '

quiet'. There must be a difference between Jane's emotions, on the two occasions, to account for the disparity in detail.

Jane recounts her successful marriage as if it were an everyday event, which is not what the reader would expect. This difference is security. In this passage Jane is uneasy, and this maybe due to her alleged psychosomatic association with Bertha, Rochester's wife, who still lives at this point. She is therefore paying great attention to her surroundings, indicating her apprehension, as she seems to be on some kind of sensory alert, whilst she refers to her marriage to Rochester at the close of the novel in a straightforward and simple style.

This is because she is secure, and she knows that she is making the correct decision regarding the rest of her life, which is a stark contrast to her situation in this passage. Jane goes into unprecedented detail when describing the sarcophagus of Damer de Rochester, ' slain at Marston Moor, in the time of the civil wars, and of Elizabeth, his wife. ' It is ironic that there is nothing to be said of Elizabeth, except that she was the wife of the Damer, and it seems that Bronte intentionally highlights this lack of appreciation.

Elizabeth has obviously bowed to the inequality of a patriarchal society, and instances such as this, in many ways, are exactly what Jane has loathed since her childhood. Elizabeth's fate heralds a life of inferiority on Jane's part, or perhaps this image is suggesting that Jane, as a result of the marriage at this date, will be eternally bound to Rochester, even past the grave. There may also be significance in the inclusion of Damer de Rochester's death in

the Civil War, which creates parallels with Jane's conflict within herself as to her true desires regarding her master.

The wedding begins, and both Rochester and Jane are damned by the first words of the ceremony that Jane describes: '... ye will answer at the dreadful Day of Judgement when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed', as both have 'secrets' weighing on their hearts. Jane's secret has already manifested itself in the veil-stamping antics of Bertha, her apparent alter ego. This secret, although she seems reluctant to admit it even to herself, is that she is not ready to marry Mr. Rochester, despite her love for him. Rochester's secret is that he is already married, despite his wife's madness and his love for Jane.

At this point Bronte completes her intense crescendo of suspense. She has built up the scene applying almost the same formulae as a director would to a modern-day film. It is obviously a momentous point in the novel and the reader will be anxious to see the couple married. Exploiting this anxiety, she mentions the final cliched words of the ceremony, before the reader learns of its abandonment; 'His lips unclosed to ask, "Wilt thou have this woman for thy wedded wife?"' By lingering on these details that have not yet passed, Bronte also has the effect of creating a literary 'slow motion', so as to further augment the suspense.

The 'existence of an impediment' is declared, and we witness Jane encountering yet another barrier between herself and happiness. The resulting movements of Mr. Rochester are a relatively rare insight into his

feelings. Jane describes his slight movements as being 'as if an earthquake had rolled under his feet'. This reflects the magnitude of Rochester's inward upheaval, as he will most likely know at this point that his attempt at bigamy has been uncovered. He merely says 'proceed', not moving his head or eyes, suggesting that whilst outwardly motionless, he is mentally sprinting, and he cannot bear to make eye contact with his fiancée.

He then 'possesses himself' of Jane's hand. However, the fact that he 'possessed' himself of her hand suggests that he does, or is trying to, possess her entirely: this is more than significant considering Jane's state of mind at the start of the passage. This turn of phrase is not new to the novel: during her days with the Reeds, Jane described herself as 'possessing herself' of a book. This book was so important to her because it transported her from the physical world to the psychological, where she could escape her unhappiness. Perhaps Mr.

Rochester holds her in a similar position, needing her to escape his fearful wife, and accounting for his love for her, and maybe, therefore, heralding a dependence. Jane holds an obvious fascination for Rochester at this point: 'how like quarried marble was his pale, firm, massive front at this moment!' It was this fascination that initially led Jane to love Rochester, this fascination that is stopping her from obeying her natural impulses and fleeing the church, and this fascination that leads her back to Rochester later in the novel. It is ironic that Jane describes Rochester as 'marble', as this is how she describes St. John after her departure from Thornfield.

The two characters directly differ in that St. John is a pious clergyman, whilst Rochester is being adulterous. The fact that Jane uses similar terms to describe them may show how she sees Rochester as clear of sin. Rochester's grasp is described as 'hot and strong'. This reflects his desperation and guilt. He seems to have lost consciousness of being forceful with Jane due to his vast mental preoccupations. Jane describes his eyes as 'still watchful, yet wild beneath!' The two adjectives, 'watchful' and 'wild', suggest an air of panic, with Rochester frantically searching for some kind of escape.

Jane has a good understanding of her master, as she is acknowledging his turbulence of spirit. This profound perception is validated considering that the nature of the 'impediment' has not yet been announced, and Jane therefore still has no idea of Rochester's secret. Throughout the passage, Jane's description of her surroundings is colourless, and almost desolate. She illustrates to the reader the 'gray old house of God', the marble tomb and marble Rochester, her own white face and cheeks, and the two dark shadows. This reflects the desolation of Jane's situation, and perhaps heralds the abandonment of the wedding.

However, contrasting with the whiteness of her cheeks, Jane notices the 'ruddy morning sky beyond'. In the inclusion of this colourful and hopeful image, Bronte is most likely giving a premonition regarding the somewhat more colourful, more optimistic future, and ultimately Jane's happy marriage to Mr. Rochester. At ground level we have less opulent imagery, with headstones, a tomb, sinister strangers and a looming church. Looking at these as a prediction of events to come, we have little hope in the present

situation or near future, but we do have a happier message regarding events on the other side of the next few hurdles.

These hurdles include instances such as Jane's night of homelessness and hunger, and her ordeals with St. John Rivers. This passage is dominated by gothic elements and themes. Bronte's imagery and literary techniques often show strong influences of the Gothic, and she uses them effectively to produce a chilling atmosphere of suspense. From the offset, the depiction of the church gives an strong sense of Gothic. Other sources such as ' the dreadful Day of Judgement' force the reader's mind into the realms of the Gothic due to their weighty implications.

Images such as Jane's ' dewy forehead' enhance this factor, and their significance is magnified due to the intricacy of this description, compared to the more factual, less intense narrative in other parts of the novel. The events described in this passage mark a turning point in the novel, and this seems to be for the worse. Yet there is a strong underlying optimism. The Priest says: ' If you know of any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined together... ye do now confess it; for ye be well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise that God's word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful.

The implications of this are powerful. Had the wedding been allowed to continue, Jane and Rochester would not have been married in God's eyes. This would bear strong significance for Jane, whose reliance on her faith is fundamental to her person; the abandonment of the wedding could therefore

be dubbed ' the best of a bad situation. ' After all, Jane's encounter with the Rivers family asserts her independence and earns her first friends, which may have been part of the final preparation she needed to marry her master.